

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SSB 6319

As Reported by House Committee On:
Criminal Justice & Corrections

Title: An act relating to failure to register as a sex offender.

Brief Description: Changing provisions for sex offender registration.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Regala, Brandland, Stevens, Kline, Weinstein, Doumit, Carrell, Keiser, Rockefeller, Berkey, Haugen, Fairley, Spanel, Pflug, Sheldon, Rasmussen, McAuliffe, Shin, Roach and Benton).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Criminal Justice & Corrections: 2/17/06, 2/23/06 [DP].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Clarifies that any knowing non-compliance with the registration statute constitutes Failure to Register as a Sex Offender.
- Increases the penalty for Failure to Register as a Sex Offender.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives O'Brien, Chair; Darneille, Vice Chair; Pearson, Ranking Minority Member; Ahern, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kirby, Strow and Williams.

Staff: Jim Morishima (786-7191).

Background:

Sex Offender Registration

In 1990, the Legislature enacted the Community Protection Act, which, among other things, created a sex offender registry in Washington. A sex or kidnapping offender must register with the county sheriff in the county where he or she resides within certain specified deadlines. The offender must notify the sheriff when he or she enrolls in a public or private school, enrolls in an institution of higher education, changes addresses or becomes homeless. The offender must also notify the county sheriff and the state patrol if he or she changes his or her name.

A sex offender who knowingly fails to register or notify the county sheriff, or who changes his or her name without notifying the county sheriff or the state patrol, is guilty of a crime. The offender is guilty of an "unranked" class C felony (zero-12 months in jail, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both) if the sex offense that caused the person to register was a felony. The person is guilty of a gross misdemeanor (zero-12 months in jail, a fine of up to \$5,000, or both) if the sex offense that caused the person to register was a misdemeanor or a gross misdemeanor. The crime is a "sex offense" for purpose of criminal sentencing.

Community Custody for Sex Offenses

"Community custody" refers to the portion of an offender's sentence spent in the community under the supervision of the Department of Corrections. When sentencing an offender for a sex offense, a court must sentence the offender to a term of community custody of 36 - 48 months if the offender's term of incarceration is over one year. If the offender's term of incarceration is one year or less, the court may sentence the offender to a term of community custody of up to 12 months.

Summary of Bill:

It is clarified, for sex offenders, that any knowing non-compliance with the registration statute constitutes Failure to Register as a Sex Offender. The penalty for Failure to Register as a Sex Offender is increased. A mandatory term of community custody is imposed for a first time offender, although the crime remains "unranked" for the first offense. A second conviction for the offense is "ranked" at seriousness level II, which would result in a mandatory prison term and another mandatory term of community custody.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed, except for section 2, which, because of prior double amendments, takes effect September 1, 2006. However, sections 3 and 4 relating to increasing the penalty for failing to register as a sex offender, are null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: Failure to register as a sex offender is a very serious crime. Offenders who fail to register are twice as likely to re-offend as other offenders. Under the current law, the penalty for failing to register is always zero-12 months in jail. This means it is impossible to send repeat violators to prison. This bill increases the penalty for the crime so that repeat offenders can be sent to prison. It also requires community custody for a first-time offender, which lets the offender know that the crime is a serious one. The registration statute can be violated in many ways, but the statute states that only certain conduct is a violation. This bill clarifies that any violation of the registration statute is a crime.

(Concerns) The provisions that state that any violation of the registration statute is a crime may make the statute unconstitutionally vague. Offenders will not have fair notice of what conduct is illegal. The behavior that exposes an offender to criminal liability should be listed specifically. The language in the existing law is clearer and easier to enforce.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Regala, prime sponsor; and Todd McBride, Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys.

(Concerns) Todd Maybrown, Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.